

Gift Exchange at Renaissance Courts: England and France, 1509-1603

Glenn Richardson (University of Surrey)

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The scale and frequency of exchange of gifts between the two rival monarchs Henry VIII and François I had no parallel, at the time or subsequently. Henry VIII saw himself as the equal or superior to François I, from whom he received a generous pension. Gifts of particular splendour were given in 1518, 1527 and 1532, on the occasion of visits or the signature of treaties. There was a reciprocity of precedence and intimacy, as well as gift-giving, between members of the French and English courts. Gifts included, as the audience could see from the slides shown, jewels, plate, clothes, furnishings, food, hunting equipment, armour, swords - never fire-arms. After 1527 the two kings wrote to each other as “bon compère et allié perpetuel”. François I was more spontaneous and more generous than Henry VIII, often disregarding protocol. Gifts played an important part in the transmission of styles and techniques. In the subsequent discussion Luc Duerloo pointed out that this was the last generation of monarchs to see each other regularly until the 1780s.